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ABSTRACT

The Urban Education Project at Research for Better Schools has developed a conceptual framework, the Urban Learner Framework (ULF) that focuses on the central role of meaningful instruction that values the experiences and backgrounds of the learners. This new view of the urban learner presents them as capable, motivated, and resilient learners who can build on their cultural strengths. It rejects the view that they are at-risk, lacking ability, unmotivated, and culturally deprived. This is a guide to integrating learner experience into instruction and is organized into two sections. The first explores the ideas that support using student background experiences as an integral part of learning and explains the construct of learner experience. The second section clarifies how to use learner experience in the classroom through lesson infusion, a process by which traditional lessons can be transformed into lessons relevant to the urban learner. Six appendixes describe the framework and provide additional information about urban learners, with a sample lesson. The appendixes contain two figures, one table, and 43 references in addition to the 36 references from the text. (SLD)

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GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING LEARNER EXPERIENCES INTO INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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Introduction

Every day urban teachers make important decisions about students, curriculum content, and instructional strategies which affect the academic success of urban learners. These decisions directly influence the extent to which learners engage in the formal curriculum of the school. Research and theory suggest that when teachers have a thorough knowledge about their students and their backgrounds, they are better able to engage those students in formal learning because they can use this knowledge in every facet of educational decisionmaking (Knapp, et al., 1993; Overton, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). Students who believe what they learn in school is relevant to their lives are more likely to become engaged in the formal learning opportunities of the school and benefit from them; they are less likely to become alienated from school (Nieto, 1994). Although educational researchers and writers increasingly realize that learning should start with what students bring to school, practice generally does not reflect these understandings. All too often classroom learning is designed only around a traditional curriculum, one that does not recognize the background, experiences, and talents of the students in urban classrooms. There is a mismatch between what the students bring and what is offered in the classroom. This guide is an attempt to reduce that mismatch by showing teachers how they can begin to align what urban students bring to school with classroom learning. It helps teachers and other educators to learn more about the backgrounds of students and to use this information in connecting students to formal learning.

The Urban Education (UE) Project at Research for Better Schools (RBS) has developed a conceptual framework, **The Urban Learner Framework (ULF)**, which focuses on the central role of meaningful instruction that values the learner's experiences and background. To fully benefit from the discussion and suggestions in this guide, it is critical to have an understanding of the central ideas of the ULF which categorizes research and theory to present a "New Vision of the Urban Learner." This "New Vision" presents urban learners as capable, motivated, resilient learners able to build on their cultural strengths. It rejects current perceptions of urban students as at-risk, lacking abilities, unmotivated, and culturally

deprived. The goal of schooling that underlies the "New Vision" is the development of autonomous individuals able to participate in making decisions about their future and society. For a more complete discussion of the New Vision of the Urban Learner see **The Urban Learner Framework: An Overview** in Appendix A.*

The discussions of LE in this guide reflect the understandings that grew out of last year's UE work with school districts and should be considered incomplete. UE knowledge regarding LE is steadily growing as staff continue to explore this construct in their development efforts. Currently, staff are engaged in several activities to discover: (1) additional ways in which urban educators use student background experiences to support learning; (2) the best strategies to provide professional development and supportive environments for educators who chose to make connections between student experiences and formal learning; and (3) indicators of student success that result from making the connections. The findings regarding LE from current work will undoubtedly both alter and expand current information.

Researchers have concluded that building on the skills, language, and behavior patterns that students bring to school is important for student learning and academic success, but it is done only infrequently** (Knapp, et al., 1993). There is little practical guidance in the current literature for practitioners on how this might be done. This document lays the foundation for changing practice.

The body of this guide is organized into two sections. The first, **Understanding Learner Experience**, explores the ideas that support using student background experiences as an integral part of learning. It explains the construct of Learner Experience (LE) which is the foundation for understanding the contextual nature of learning, gives suggestions on how to learn more about students backgrounds, and offers tips for teachers on how to develop their capacity to gain this new information. The second section, **Using Learner Experience to Develop Meaningful Instruction**, clarifies how to use LE in the

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* While all four themes of the ULF are interrelated (See Appendix A), work reported here focuses mainly on the "Cultural Diversity and Learning Theme."

** ***Making Academic Instruction Work for Children from Different Backgrounds,*** (Knapp, et al., 1993, pp. 329-348) explores how teachers respond to students from different backgrounds. Both positive and negative patterns, falling along a continuum were found. See Appendix B for further explanation.

classroom by explaining the key components of lesson infusion, a process by which traditional lessons, often devoid of specific connections to learner experiences, can be transformed into lessons that acknowledge existing student knowledge about the lesson content and build upon it to facilitate new learning.

Understanding Learner Experience

The information which follows is organized into a series of questions which might be asked by teachers who want to take concrete steps to alter their practice to reflect the experiences of learners. The answers represent the experience of the UE staff in working with educators to discover how to achieve this goal.

■ What is learner experience (LE)?

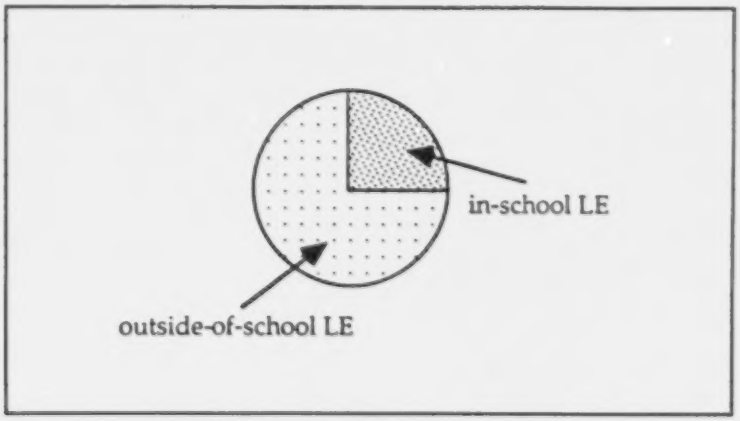
Learner experience (LE) is a construct used to describe all of the dynamic environmental or contextual influences that help to shape students' learning -- their thinking, knowledge, belief systems, values, and actions. These influences result from interactions in the home, the school, and the community at large. LE defines the contextualized knowledge and personal meaning that students bring to school and which teachers and students must link to school learning in order for optimal academic achievement to occur. LE provides a frame of reference for better understanding how to support school learning.

To simplify matters from an educational perspective, we can look at LE in terms of originating from two sources: in-school LE and outside-of-school LE (see Figure 1). In-school LE results when the learner interacts with both the formal curriculum and with the norms, rules, and other aspects of the school culture. Outside-of-school LE results when the learner goes about daily life apart from school activities. Most teachers gather and use information about in-school LE; however, the amount of knowledge about and the consistent use of outside-of-school LE varies considerably with each teacher. In some cases, teachers are unfamiliar with important aspects of outside-of-school LE. Barbara Bowman (1992, p. 133) points out that

> children from inner-city communities, for example, often do not come to schools or centers having had the experiential background that ties easily to the reading materials considered most appropriate for young children. Books focus on baby animals, zoo animals, pets, milkmen, kind policemen, grass, and flowers -- ideas and concepts not frequently encountered in the children's daily lives. When children do not have the relevant background, they do not learn 'naturally' in the seamless and organic way that teachers have been led to expect.

Not only does the school emphasize information unfamiliar to vast numbers of urban learners, but it also fails to use information about the home or community life of students and their families that might be useful in classroom instruction (Moll, et al., 1992).

Figure 1: Sources of Learner Experience



Considering the two sources of LE, it is not surprising that teachers are more knowledgeable about in-school LE. Much of in-school LE is explicit due to the major influence of the formal curriculum; the learner interacts with specific content, at designated times, according to a plan based on stated policies, procedures, and structures. However, there are equally influential aspects of in-school LE that are implicit and result from the school's culture. Although the use of in-school LE is important to learning, this guide focuses primarily on a better understanding of outside-of-school LE because it is clearly underutilized as a tool for improving instruction.

Some teachers artfully tap both in-school and outside-of-school LE as they interact with urban learners in the classroom. Such teachers have either an intuitive or a conscious understanding that learning is contextual, builds on prior knowledge and skills, and occurs within a social relationship (Bandura 1977; Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). However, the less familiar a teacher is with aspects of

outside-of-school LE, the less it can be used to facilitate student learning. The less it is used, the greater the likelihood that urban learners are alienated from school -- failing to understand what is being taught, and in too many cases leading to missing classes, performing acts of vandalism and violence, and dropping out of school. While some teachers are able to use LE to foster learning, the out-of-school experiences of urban learners are not always recognized or considered appropriate resources for use in school. One research project (Moll, et al., 1992, p. 134) focused on uncovering the kinds of out-of-school knowledge and skills that children of color possessed that appeared to be underutilized in the classroom.

> In some cases, [the children's] participation is central to the household's functioning, as when the children contribute to the economic production of the home [through a job or participating in a family business], or use their knowledge of English to mediate the household's communications with outside institutions, such as the school or government offices. In other cases they are active in household chores, such as repairing appliances or caring for younger siblings.

One way to appreciate the breadth, complexity, and richness of LE is to think of the three dimensions of LE (i.e., knowledge, skills; values, beliefs, interests, motivations; and behaviors) as shown in **Figure 2, "Dimensions of Learner Experience: Some Examples."** These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive. There is overlap between the dimensions; specific examples can contain all three dimensions. UE staff have begun an ethnographic research project to identify the experiences of urban learners within these dimensions. For some initial results see **Appendix C: Urban Children's Interests, Hopes, and Concerns: Preliminary Patterns**. UE staff hope that this research will provide additional concrete examples of LE across the three dimensions.

■ **I already use some learner experience in my teaching, so what should I do differently?**

All teachers know and use LE at times. The issue is one of depth and breadth of usage, particularly as it relates to the outside-of-school LE. The personal challenge is how much you know about your urban learners and how much of what you know is used in the teaching and learning activities.

Figure 2

Dimensions of Learner Experience: Some Examples

Dimensions of Learner Experience*	Description of the Dimension	Examples
1. *Knowledge, Skills*	■ What learners know and know how to do through their daily home, community, and school experiences.	■ Household knowledge [from a sample of Mexican American families] may include information about farming and animal management, associated with households' rural origins, or knowledge about construction and building, related to urban occupations, as well as knowledge about many other matters, such as trade, business, and finance on both sides of the border (Moll, 1992, p.133).
2. *Values, Beliefs, Interests, Motivations*	■ Things that are important to learners. ■ Prime influences on choices, decisions, and goals.	■ The Hispanic child is expected to: cooperate, share, help other family members; contribute to the family; reflect well on the family; help brothers and sisters; put family first (Montecel, et. al., 1993, p. 16).
3. *Behaviors*	■ Verbal communication patterns (e.g., language development, discourse patterns, questioning and answering patterns) ■ Nonverbal communication patterns (e.g., body language, personal space, meanings associated with artifacts) ■ Preferred ways of learning (e.g., trial and error, visual/ spatial) ■ Interaction patterns (e.g., child-child, child-adult) ■ Orientation modes (e.g., sense of time)	■ In Marva Collins' classroom, she uses interaction patterns commonly found in the African American church: choral and responsive reading, audience participation, use of analogies, and the identification of a moral or personal message from the passage read (Villegas, 1991, p. 18). ■ Both [teachers] are fluent in Black English, they freely banter with the students on the playground and in non-instructional conversations using Black English. This linguistic ability allows the teachers into the students' world and provides the students with easy access to standard forms of English (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 317). ■ Since one-third of the children [in this school] are Haitian American, we make a particular effort to include Haitian folktales and storytelling in our curriculum. The traditions of oral storytelling are part of other cultures as well, and also have status in our literature curriculum during all thematic studies (Richards, 1993, p. 55).

* Adapted from Longstreet, W. (1978). ***Aspects of ethnicity: Understanding differences in pluralistic classrooms.*** New York: Teachers College Press.

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An emerging body of evidence (Knapp, et al., 1993; MacLeod, 1991; Moll, et al., 1992; Sylvester, 1994; Villegas, 1991) suggests that teachers who continually learn about and consistently use outside-of-school LE are able to create caring classroom environments where urban learners are more motivated, learn better, and feel more positively about themselves. The strategies in this paper are suggestions for tapping and using the out-of-school experiences of urban learners in the teaching and learning process. Hopefully, such strategies will encourage you to use more LE than you currently do.

■ **I want to begin tapping more outside-of-school LE than I'm using now. Where do I start?**

One place to start is to initially uncover those experiences that matter the most to urban learners. You may want to think about those experiences that make students happy and excited -- or possibly sad and frightened; those experiences that they strongly remember and care about deeply, such as relationships with their family and friends; their favorite activities; and experiences that inspire, or even force, them to think about their futures. LE is everything that happens to kids, but more importantly it's about those things that really matter to urban learners. Villegas (1991, p. 16-17) describes an example of a teaching and learning experience, as part of Moll and Diaz's San Diego Project, that connects with what some urban learners really care about.

> [O]ne instructor was able to use the cultural resources of the students in teaching English language skills. Bilingualism, a topic of interest to the community and to the students, was the central theme of this particular module, which required the students to develop a questionnaire to survey the opinions of community members about bilingualism. The students were then expected to administer the questionnaire to several members of the community and prepare a report of findings. The objective of ascertaining the community's opinions gave purpose to all the writing connected with this module. As Moll and Diaz explain, because the students were curious to find out the different views on bilingualism held in the community, they became fully engaged in the various writing activities. Students who had previously been considered incapable of writing in English became sufficiently motivated to produce essays in their second language. The key to the success of this module was the opportunity it gave the students to engage in purposeful writing, especially on a topic of interest to them and of relevance to their community.
>
> The everyday experiences of minority children from low-income or minority backgrounds are often considered unsuitable terrain for educators to explore. As a result, many topics of interest to these students are avoided by teachers. This is unfortunate because it tends to alienate students and to distance them from the learning process. As the San Diego Project shows, the introduction of community-related themes into

instruction (even though these themes may appear controversial at times) can increase students' motivation to learn.

Another consideration in looking for LE is focusing on the strategies urban children develop to get them through the day. Such strategies are quite often influenced by having as much fun as possible or by developing meaningful relationships. Urban learners create imaginative ways to deal with all of the opportunities -- and the adversities -- that are present in their environment. For example, urban children UE staff have worked with in Camden, New Jersey, were adept at finding quiet places to explore and search for wildlife such as, turtles, snakes, and fish. These children also found ways to make an adventure out of trips to the shopping mall or grocery store. Having fun really motivates urban learners. Their strategies for getting though the day involve carving out places and spaces where they can have fun. How can we help them do this? How can we make the teaching-learning process more fun? Fun is a big motivator and it may be an underutilized vehicle for learning. Knowing the experiences and interests of urban learners will give you information about what is fun for your students; with this insight, you can make classroom learning more enjoyable.

A third category of LE are the strategies that help keep urban learners safe. Urban children in Camden learned to identify and avoid drug dealers and gang members so that they could get to school safely and find places to play in the community. These strategies were developed from observing older siblings and peers, as a result of the hard lessons of direct experience of urban life, and from the explicit teaching of parents who tell their children what to look out for and how to react to certain situations. Rosier & Corsaro (1993, p. 191) found that urban parents instruct children on how to deal with negative or dangerous situations in their neighborhoods. For example, one mother "tells her son he must come up on the porch when he sees a group of teenagers on the street because 'you never know, kids have access to everything now, guns, and I don't want to be a statistic.'" Rosier and Corsaro also reported urban parents involve their children in community activities so that they have constructive pastimes and the parents can actively monitor their children's playmates and activities. There is considerable teaching going on in the home from a very young age in order to help their children survive on the street. The

challenge for you is to understand what urban students know as a result of their experience and to connect this prior learning with new learning in the classroom.

■ **Will I have to change the way I think and interact with my students to use LE?**

Many teachers discover that they must alter familiar ways of doing things. The basis of this new approach to teaching and learning is not a matter of mastering a quantity of new information. Rather it is a "belief" issue involving attitudes toward the urban learner. It requires that beliefs and practices be aligned with the ideas in the Urban Learner Framework. Using LE requires a commitment -- an openness to learning many different things about urban learners. It entails the development of a heightened sensitivity to their world and being tuned into who and what they are. As Molefi Kete Asanté (Richards, 1993, p. 60) states "the role of the teacher is to make the student's world and the classroom congruent."

As you interact with students differently, you will pick up on the cues and clues about their needs, thoughts, and feelings. Having an urban learner information bank may be valuable, but it is not as important as being open to the urban learners themselves -- and to their families and communities. In one session with urban educators, a teacher-leader shared with the group a comment made by the narrator in a documentary on rain forests, "unless you understand something, you cannot care for it." She saw this statement as equally applicable to urban children. A commitment to continuous learning also helps. The more information you have about urban learners, the easier your job will become in the end. The experience of Moll and others (1992, p. 136) has shown that "as the teacher gathered new information about the family, their history, and activities, she started making connections to instructional activities she wanted to develop -- a common experience among the teachers and a key moment in our work." In a lesson, if you first make connections with the urban learner and then use the information that you gather in a systematic and reflective way during the instructional process, you will make the teaching-learning process more fun, relevant, and meaningful for the learners. You will establish credibility with the students as a result of trust and strengthening relationships. You will enhance your

ability to communicate with both urban learners and their parents. This process will keep you flexible and open to new ways of tying the out-of-school world of students to school learning.

■ **Should I look at learner experience from an individual or a group point of view?**

You should be cautious when it comes to notions of group characteristics. Even within the most well-meaning characterizations lies the potential for stereotyping (Armstrong, 1994). There is significant diversity and differentiation within groups. Bowman (1992, p. 129) points out that "children's behavior results from the integration of group mores with their own individual (genetic/ temperamental) characteristics; the pacing of cultural expectations with their developmental (age/stage) capabilities; and the syntheses of the conflicting roles, beliefs, and attitudes of various members of the child rearing community." In fact, there may be more diversity within a group than between groups on certain characteristics. You have to be ever vigilant about not attributing a characteristic identified as representing an ethnic or language-minority group to each and every individual urban learner who is a member of that group.

With the qualification above, there is value in learning about patterns of behavior that appear to be shared by group members. Judith Richards (1995, p. 49) offers this perspective, "Family members 'teach culture' through a complex network of verbal and nonverbal socializations. In this sense, culture is learned and is a factor of where and when you were born and raised. Therefore, members of any ethnic group may share common cultural traditions, interpretations of events, and knowledge, but the teacher must be careful not to make any assumptions about cultural understanding based on ethnic designations." You may read, for example, that Latino-Americans place considerably more value on the family than on the individual (Montecel, et al., 1993, p. 16). If this is accurate, this information could impact the way you interact with Maria. You might ask yourself "Let me see if the importance of the family applies to Maria." You talk to her and discover that she deeply values her family. Later in the year, a new Latino student José joins your class. You wonder if José places the same importance on the family as Maria does. You include as part of a writing task for José a section which will give him the

opportunity to naturally surface his views about his family. The information about a particular group is used as a clue that suggests an LE area that is worth exploring.

■ **What are some ways to learn about LE?**

When teachers live and teach in the same community, they naturally talk with parents and other community members, thus, they know the kinds of things that go on with the family and understand what happens outside of school in general. For example, these teachers go to the grocery store, encounter students, and participate in other community activities. Living in the community provides a natural source of information.

Teachers who do not live in the community, but who have a desire to learn about the community, have to make an extra effort to find out things -- not only about the individual student, but also about the cultural context in which that student exists. While working with one group of educators, LE staff found there was tension between the teachers who lived in the community and those who did not. Those who left at 3 o'clock and had little connection with the community were seen as less involved with and caring about the urban learner. This tension is not uncommon in urban school districts. Teachers who have other obligations or concerns have to guard against having a one-dimensional view of the child (i.e., the child is existing only within a school context).

Thus, one major source of LE information is exposure to the family and the community. Another source of information, which should be natural for any teacher, is finding out more about the child through classroom activities. Assignments can provide opportunities to surface LE as part of the lesson itself. By showing your urban learners a genuine interest in their lives, all sorts of good things begin to happen. Ask the students about their experiences outside of school. Get the students talking about their family, their extended family, the history of where their families have lived, and their family members' work and leisure activities -- anything which contributes to a deeper understanding of the students' culture and the historical background of the family and neighborhood. Have students interview people in their neighborhood: grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, and uncles. Get them to actively collect

information that can be used in stories (both written and oral), drawings, or poems. Students will develop a sense of personal worth and will generate a sense of where they come from -- and hopefully where they are going.

The hopes and dreams of urban learners are also a critical aspect of LE. It is vital for you to provide opportunities for your students to write about their hopes and dreams and to discuss them with adults and peers. Through UE staff conversations and interviews with urban learners, we found that they have high hopes for their futures which are reflected in their job aspirations. For example, they hope to become lawyers, ice skaters, nurses, doctors, singers, scientists, architects, world travelers, and politicians. Helping urban learners see which aspects of curriculum are stepping stones to skills needed in order to accomplish their hopes and dreams is important. This can be reinforced by inviting adults who have achieved some of the urban learners hopes and dreams to contribute to classroom learning events. The more students can associate with these adults, the greater the impact of their message.

There are mentoring programs in major cities that connect students with adults who are doing things of interest to the children. The research is pretty clear that the things urban students are interested in doing are the things that all kids are interested in doing. The high aspirations, and the range of professions they hope to enter show how committed young people can be even if they are growing up in precarious places. **Appendix D: Ways to Access Learner Experience Information** contains examples of strategies that help teachers to uncover LE.

■ **What steps do I need to take to do this well?**

There are several things you can do to increase your capacity to uncover LE.

- *Be a careful observer.* Every moment that you spend with students, whether inside or outside the classroom, presents an opportunity for observing them. The objective of such observations is to make a deliberate attempt to see children differently -- from a strengths-based perspective. In this way, teachers can see urban students in new and

more complex ways. [See **Appendix E: Systematic Observation of In-School Learner Experience**]

- *Learn how others have uncovered and used LE.* Read articles to give you ideas about the experiences of others as they have changed their practice by using LE. Many of the articles referenced in this guide give clues about uncovering LE. Some good places to start are: Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll, et al., 1992; Richards, 1993; and Sylvester, 1994).
- *Be resourceful.* You have surfaced some LE but you are not really sure what it is. Connect with other people who are from that same language or ethnic minority group and ask them to explain it. "Help me understand this. What does this indicate?" For example, you observe, over time, that several of your Asian students do not look directly at you when you are talking to them. You think this shows a lack of respect (from otherwise cooperative students). Yet, when you check with an Asian colleague, you discover you are wrong. In fact, it is a display of respect common to people of Asian backgrounds.
- *Share information about yourself.* Communicate to students so that they get a sense of who you are; so that you are not this distant, impenetrable object, but rather a real-live human being with whom the students interact. This provides students with the kinds of behaviors that are appropriate for learning, as well as the kinds of behaviors that are appropriate for sharing oneself. Learning about your own cultural identity and reflecting upon where there is overlap with others will provide you with opportunities to connect both to diverse populations of students.
- *Display a willingness to learn.* This LE approach to teaching is based on continuous learning. "It is important to learn how culture is expressed in students' lives, how students live in their worlds. We can't make assumptions about these things. Only a part of that child is present in the classroom (Moll, et al, 1992, p. 137)." Each new wave of immigration that enters urban classrooms requires a corresponding willingness to learn.

- *Be a risk taker.* Be receptive to incorporating LE into daily teaching and learning activities. Then get some feedback by asking students what they found meaningful in these activities. This is necessary, particularly, with learners who are from cultural backgrounds very different from your own.
- *Collaborate with others.* Reach out to colleagues and, especially, families and the community. Consider relationships as resources for understanding LE. Moll and others (1992, p. 138) write about a parent coming into the school and sharing personal experiences about her entrepreneurial activities, "notice, however, that this was not a typical parent visit to correct or sort papers; the purpose of the parent's visit was to contribute intellectually to the students' academic activity. This parent, in effect, became a cognitive resource for the students and teacher in this classroom." Collaboration does not just happen. It takes a conscious, sustained effort. "Interpretation of the school's agenda to parents," states Bowman (1992, p. 136), "is as important -- perhaps more important -- than many of the other tasks at which teachers spend their time. Only if parents and teachers can collaborate are children free to learn from both." Lisa Delpit (1988, p. 296) goes even further by stating that, "appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest."
- *Demonstrate creativity.* The challenge is not to throw out your current practice, but to imaginatively infuse it with the experiences of urban learners. One of the characteristics of a creative person is that they can take familiar things and use them in new ways. There may be untapped resources already available that are waiting to be used. For example, one urban teacher-leader we have worked with pointed out that every middle school student in his school district is required to complete the ***Career Interest***

Inventory (published by Psychological Corporation, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). Students indicate their preferences to a wide array of action statements (e.g., draw pictures for a book, manage a hotel, drive a truck to haul things, help people learn how to speak correctly). An individualized report is even produced. This is a gold mine of LE data that can be used in a variety of ways in the classroom. His comment, unfortunately, was that few teachers saw a connection between this "career" information (to be used by guidance counselors) and the day-to-day teaching and learning in their classrooms.

- *Strive for authenticity.* Urban learners are very good at identifying inauthentic behavior by people that may pretend to like them or pretend to be interested in them. They will respond positively to you if you genuinely care, are compassionate, and supportive of them.

■ What challenges might I encounter by becoming more involved in surfacing and using learner experience?

The gathering of LE information results in wonderful resources for furthering student learning; however, it also brings with it the following challenges that you should be aware of as your start.

- *Sensitivity of information.* The goal of surfacing LE is not to make the student vulnerable, but to understand the student. Some information may be personal and discretion is necessary. In fact, reaching out and establishing rapport and trust with parents, guardians, or other family members is almost a prerequisite to information gathering. By enlisting the support of these caregivers, you can counter some of the possible misunderstandings that might arise. Once the family understands the goal, it permits the forming of a partnership between the family and the school for the benefit of their child. The potential for problems should therefore be reduced.
- *Information that demands action on your part.* If problematic information surfaces (e.g., child abuse), then the normal procedures for referrals should be followed. You can enlist the support of an administrator, fellow teachers, or other school personnel such as a

school counselor to help the student and his/her family connect with the appropriate agencies for assistance.

- *Time and involvement.* Like any change, the use of LE data in teaching and learning may be time consuming and frustrating while the new behavior is not yet comfortable and automatic. Over the long run, this approach will make your teaching more productive and enjoyable, and your students more successful. This new approach has to ultimately come from you -- you cannot be forced to do it by an outside authority. Luis Moll (1990, p. 8) strongly states that

  > no innovation has a realistic chance of succeeding unless teachers are thoroughly involved in the process; unless teachers are able to express, define, and address problems as they see them; unless teachers come to see the innovation or the change as theirs. The ultimate outcome of the innovation (or of a replication, we could add) depends on when and how teachers become part of the decision to initiate change.

- *Managing the LE data.* One approach is to identify LE and use it as you progress. The more you identify LE, the more you'll have to use. Another approach would involve some attempt to capture some of this data for your own records. One thing to consider is what information regarding LE, and in what form, should you pass along to next year's teacher?

- *Targeting which LE data to collect.* If you have an atmosphere of trust and you have an open dialogue with your students, they will tell you what is important to them.

- *Feeling overwhelmed.* "I can't do all of this." Strategies for breaking down the task into more manageable segments can help. You might focus on a small group of students who share something in common, or pick out a representative sample from the whole class, or select one student a week or a month. You may partner with another teacher who shares your students and pool your LE information.

- *Personal safety.* You may feel it is unsafe to apply some of the strategies for surfacing LE, such as visiting homes in certain areas of the community. Besides considering

another LE strategy, other options might be: ask someone to accompany you (a school coordinator or an advisor, a parent, or somebody who has recognition in the community), or find some neutral ground (e.g., a community center or church) to meet the family.

- *Making practice changes in isolation.* "[T]eachers are psychologically alone even though they are in a densely populated setting (Sarason, 1982, p. 133)." Consider enlisting a partner or forming a small group to work together. Ideally, you would have a chance to reflect upon your progress at least once or twice a week. Maybe you could have lunch together or spend an hour during common free-periods. You could discuss these issues, and try to get a sense of what the other teachers are learning from their students, and what is working for them. This helps create common ground. Maybe a colleague could provide insight into a certain group of students that you are having trouble with. Having a small group or network within the school -- or with other teachers from other schools - can reduce isolation and offer help and support.
- *Going beyond superficial uses of LE data.* It is vital to utilize the outside-of-school experiences in complex ways to stimulate the range to cognitive processes of urban learners. Be careful not to limit your LE use to simplistic, narrow activities. For example, a teacher may learn that many of his students are highly interested in rap music. He then plays rap music during a transition time during the day to make the classroom environment better reflect students interests. If this is the extent to which LE data is used, then the point of this paper has been missed. The challenge for you is to make sure the LE data engages your students' complex cognitive process -- taping both the students multiple intelligences (Armstrong, 1994; Campbell, et al., 1992; Gardner, 1993; Lazear, 1991, 1994) and higher order thinking skills (Costa, 1985; Marzano, et al., 1988). [For those interested in examples of rap music used in teaching and learning, see Anderson (1993) and Richardson (1993).]

Using Learner Experiences to Develop Meaningful Instruction

After being exposed to the Urban Learner Framework and the idea of using learner experiences to make classroom learning more relevant to urban learners, teachers often ask the following question: **Where do I go from here? I have knowledge about LE, willingness to change the way I think and interact with my students, and interest in making better connections.**

In response to the question, UE staff developed a lesson infusion process that suggests one way teachers can incorporate LE into their instructional activities. This process is based on the belief that students come to school with strengths that must be seen, valued, understood, and used in order for students to be successful socially, culturally, and cognitively (Gay, 1994; Haberman, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; and Williams & Newcombe, 1994).

This section of the teachers guide begins exploring the concept of lesson infusion by introducing the components of the lesson infusion process. It represents the thinking of our project -- supported by research and practice -- about ways to make connections between the experiences of urban learners and curriculum content. Next, two examples of the lesson infusion process are offered. The first is an introductory lesson on volcanoes. The second example is a lesson on Columbus' voyage to America. For both, a brief overview of the original lesson is given. This is followed by the infused lesson, written in a first person format to dramatically illustrate the interrelationships between the thinking and the actions of the teachers. Each lesson starts with the teacher considering how she will use the students' LE to make connections between the students and her content. It continues with the instructional activities the teacher uses and concludes with her reflections on the lesson experience. Finally, the ways in which the four components of the lesson infusion process were applied to each lesson are discussed. Lesson infusion is a strategy to address what really matters to urban learners, to develop instructional activities that build on urban learner experiences, and to make meaningful connections throughout the curriculum.

It is important to note that the theme and focus of the volcano lesson are the ideas of a District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) teacher, Carolyn Drummond, who participated in the Fall 1993 "New

Vision of the Urban Learner" Course. UE staff used her ideas to create **Example 1: The Volcano Lesson** included in this document. The "New Vision" course was conducted by UE staff at the request of the district's Center for Systemic Educational Change. This ongoing undertaking provides opportunities for DCPS staff to meet the needs of their students by exploring ways to contextualize their instructional practices. **Example 2: Columbus' Voyage to America** is a UE product that represents a segment of the "New Vision" course. It has been used several times by UE staff with school and school district participants who are engaged in a simulated classroom situation. Both lessons allow UE to demonstrate to educators how to unite research and practice while building on practitioner strengths. The lessons, because they originated in real professional development settings, are authentic demonstrations of the use of LE. They can be studied by a wider audience of educators who would like to make learning more relevant for their students.

■ Key Components of the Lesson Infusion Process

The lesson infusion process is offered as one opportunity for teachers to consider the relationships among their beliefs, their students' experiences, and their classroom practices. Described below are the four key components of lesson infusion.

1. **Review your subject matter to determine what you plan to teach. Then ask yourself, "What do I need to do to align my beliefs and practices with the "New Vision of the Urban Learner"?**

As you identify the objective(s) of your lesson, we suggest that you **stop** and consider what really matters to your children regarding the lesson objective(s). This is a critical first step because the answer to that question **and** what you do about it can lead to some very interesting results.

According to Barbara Bowman (1994), what the teacher understands about how children learn and what he or she values regarding how children demonstrate their knowledge determines the extent to which the students become connected to learning. She believes that schools have ignored or rejected different cultural expressions of development that are normal, are adequate demonstrations of knowledge, and are abilities upon which school skills and knowledge can be built. Urban children have

some life experiences that are different from their suburban and rural counterparts. These experiences must be seen, understood, valued, and used in the classroom to make the teaching and learning process relevant and meaningful. Many teachers with whom UE staff have worked say that to address what really matters to urban children, a different belief system than the one currently reflected in classrooms is required.

Teachers of urban learners should analyze their beliefs about these children and their instructional practices to see whether or not they support the concepts of the ULF. As teachers stop to think about instruction they must consider very consciously the larger question of why they are teaching. Teachers should ask themselves questions like: Am I here to dominate urban learners? Or am I here to empower them? Am I here to support cultural diversity? Or am I influenced by the beliefs of cultural deficits? Am I here to help all children develop culturally, cognitively, and socially? Or am I here to maintain the status quo? This first component of the lesson infusion process synchronizes instructional objectives of the curriculum content and the teacher beliefs; it serves as the foundation for the remaining decisions that will influence the quality of the learning experience.

2. Make a connection between the students' experience and the curriculum content.

Earlier sections in this document describe research-based activities (Moll, et al., 1992) that offer suggestions for accessing and using learner experiences as a way to make better connections between children and classroom learning. Another way to make meaningful connections is through the use of themes.

Universal themes when used as a learning strategy have the ability to connect all children to the curriculum. They can foster powerful emotional, cognitive, and cultural connections between the learner and the content. Universal themes tap intrinsic motivation and connect to personal experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Stevens (1993) views themes as windows of learning whereby students discover connections among themselves, their education, and their world. This concept is exemplified in a unit of study developed by Judith Richards, a contributor to an edited text on teaching in a multicultural classroom (Richards, 1993). In discussions of the unit entitled "A Sense of Place," she

provides an example of a theme that yields "opportunities to view the curriculum through many cultural lenses."

In the lesson examples which follow, the universal theme approach was used and the connections between classroom learning and student experience were made through the use of analogies (eruptions/ volcanoes) and multiple points of views (Columbus/discovery). In both cases the goal was the same: to have students explore the theme and find meaning in it. UE work in this area continues to evolve and staff are currently exploring additional ways to make powerful connections. Those findings will be shared in future documents. The point stressed here is the importance of assessing current instructional approaches and determining ways to design instruction that children find meaningful and that are natural connections to the curriculum.

3. **Begin your lesson with an activity that connects to the strengths students bring. Then, build on it with activities that draw on their experiences and furthers their learning.**

In **Appendix D: Ways to Access Learner Experience Information** there are several examples of activities that can make learning events relevant to urban learners by giving learner experience a central role in the learning event. For example, when students gather information for oral histories, produce neighborhood videos, or create art representing their experiences, they are able to see themselves as "integral participants" in the teaching and learning process because the learning events are centered in their own experiences; they become part of the curriculum (Asante, 1991; Haberman, 1994). They also provide opportunities for urban learners to develop complex cognitive and functional skills as they engage in contextualized, motivating activities involving inquiry, problem posing, research, problem solving, creation, performance, production, discussion, development, and sharing. A lesson design presented in this context "builds bridges that meet students where they are and helps them be where they need to be to participate fully and meaningfully in the construction of knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Additionally, these kinds of lessons help urban learners achieve the larger goal of "retaining their primary identity and at the same time function effectively in the larger society" (Bowman, 1992).

4. Reflect on the instructional experience to note new insights and considerations for change.

Reflection provides opportunities to think deeply about what one is doing, to ask better questions, break out of fruitless routines, make connections, and experiment with fresh ideas (Brandt, 1991). Reflection helps teachers to consider how well their beliefs and practices are aligned with the concepts of the Urban Learner Framework and to use that information as the basis for instructional decisionmaking and change. The process of engaging in lesson infusion activities provides excellent opportunities to **develop one's own understandings** about urban learners. By taking part in an experience like this teachers can own the "new vision" ideas in ways that go far beyond having someone tell them what they ought to understand. This process is one way to get teachers started with exploring new ideas and concepts, seeing how they unfold, and surfacing their own learnings and developments. Some questions to guide your reflection process include:

- How did my students react?
- What did I see, understand, and value about my urban learners?
- What LE did I use in my infused lesson and why?
- So now, what does all of this mean to me?

■ **Example 1: Introductory Lesson on Volcanoes**

Overview of the original lesson. This 6th grade earth science lesson includes several activities developed to teach children about the geological processes of volcanoes and the environmental effects they have on humans. In the introductory segment that provides a background for investigating volcanoes, students are asked to surface any information they already know about volcanoes: where they exist, the effects they produce, how people are affected, and so forth. During the discussion the teacher notes terms that will connect to future activities and asks students to look up the meaning of the terms as a prerequisite to the next lesson. Other activities include small-group research on one of the volcanoes and the creation of a map showing volcanic activity around the world.

Infused lesson. I am a 6th grade teacher planning to teach an introductory earth science lesson on volcanoes. My objective is to help students investigate volcanoes and explore the effects of volcanic activity in various parts of the world. As I think about volcanoes, I must consider what connections I can make between volcanoes and the lives of my children. What experiences are similar? What about volcanoes really matters to my kids? Can I develop a theme or concept related to volcanoes that will interest them and motivate them to explore these learning events with me? One theme that comes to mind is "eruptions." As I think about eruptions and my 6th graders, I envision them being able to surface experiences at a personal level, in their homes, in their community, and in school. I believe they can identify a range of examples dealing with eruptions, and I think their experiences will parallel what I want to begin teaching about volcanoes.

Activity 1. The lesson begins with the students looking at the word "eruptions" that is written on the board. I ask the students if they can describe -- from their own experiences -- how they have been exposed to eruptions. I use a mind map to capture the range of responses. For example, Carol talks about a case of acne that created some eruptions on her sister's face. She details how over a few days her sister's face evolved from a smooth surface to the raising of bumps, the bursting of bumps, and the spilling out of the bacteria. Robert describes an eruption of uncontrollable laughter when he attended the African Methodist Episcopal Church service and listened to his mom's choir sing off key. Hakim reports a pretty nasty argument that erupted when a friend's brother felt he was not respected by a clerk in the neighborhood grocery store. In each case, students describe the various aspects of an eruption that corresponded very well with the focus of Activity 2. Although they use different terms, their prior knowledge of eruptions clearly was evident.

Activity 2. As a whole group the class engages in discussion about the Earth's "eruptions." During this period, many questions are raised about the location of volcanoes, their effects on the environment, and their impact on people and the economy. After the discussion, the class is ready to explore answers to their questions through a team approach to research and learning. Each team is provided with information about one area of the world that has experienced volcanic eruptions (e.g., Washington State, Hawaii, Philippines, and Indonesia). Information packets are distributed that include a map of the area; background narrative; guiding questions; and a resource list of people, books, videos and films, and CD-Roms available on their topic. Next, project specifications are discussed including presentation dates and format and group process issues. Each team reviews its packet and begins organizing to complete the task. After a week of preparation, each group presents their learnings about volcanoes to their classmates.

Reflections. Instead of preoccupying myself with the surfacing of prior knowledge about volcanoes, I needed to put students ahead of my content and consider what really matters to them. Avoiding the rush to address what really mattered to me was an idea that initially felt foreign and was hard to conceptualize. Students had prior knowledge about eruptions and it was my job to draw that out and help them connect it to the volcanic eruptions that represented my content area. It was easier for me to teach them about volcanoes when I designed the lesson around what they already knew.

The children came with a wealth of knowledge. My challenge was to demystify the process of learning -- to help children understand (and probably myself as well) that although the volcanic eruptions were described using different terminology they were analogous to their personal experiences of

eruptions. The children became excited and highly engaged when they realized they were already knowledgeable about the subject matter. Their willingness to demonstrate their understandings to their peers was reflected in the creativity and quality of their presentations.

The key here was finding the common ground and building on it -- and thus, expanding the common ground for all of us. Since each group of students will bring different experiences to the lesson, this lesson can remain fresh for me each time I teach it.

■ The Components of the Lesson Infusion Process Applied to the Volcano Lesson

1. Review your subject matter to determine what you plan to teach. Then ask yourself, "What do I need to do to align my beliefs and practices with the "New Vision of the Urban Learner."

I am planning to teach an earth science lesson on volcanoes for 6th graders. My lesson objective is to help students investigate volcanoes and explore the effects of volcanic activity in various parts of the world.

As I begin this lesson infusion process I need to think about ways I can help make volcanoes more familiar to my students. I must bring some aspect of volcanoes closer to their worlds. I know why I believe this content is important for them to learn -- the Earth's geologic processes have major environmental impacts that have significant implications and I want them to be informed and knowledgeable about them. But, I still need to think about how to get them motivated to explore this content with me -- how to make this content connect to their worlds right here in the city. I know they have meaningful experiences that this subject matter can build upon. I just have to think about how to pull it all together.

2. Make a connection between the students' experience and the curriculum content.

One way to connect to my sixth graders is through the theme of "eruptions." As I think about eruptions and my 6th graders, I envision them being able to describe experiences at a personal level, in their homes, in their community, and in school. I believe they can surface a range of examples that

illustrate their understandings of eruptions -- something being forced out or released with suddenness. And I think their experiences will parallel what I want to teach about volcanoes.

3. **Begin your lesson with an activity that connects to strengths students bring. Then, build on it with activities that build on their experiences and farthers their learning.**

I'll begin this introductory lesson with the students looking at the word "eruptions" that is written on the board. I'll ask the students if they can describe -- from their own experiences -- how they have encountered eruptions. I'll use a mind map to capture the range of responses and to illustrate the breadth and depth of their prior knowledge of eruptions.

Through a team research and learning exercise, the class will continue its exploration of eruptions, but, this time related to the Earth. This activity will involve the students in research activities to seek answers to questions raised about the Earth's eruptions, and it will conclude with each group presenting its learnings to other classmates.

4. **Reflect on the instructional experience to note new insights and considerations for change.**

This process made me slow down and take the time to think through my lesson and determine what really matters to my children about what I was to teach. I believe that children came with relevant knowledge and this experience enabled me to help them compare their wealth of knowledge to the knowledge in the curriculum. It helped me make some meaningful connections, and it made them feel like experts who were willing to share their expertise with others.

■ ***Example 2: Lesson on Columbus' Voyage to America****

Overview of the original lesson. This seventh grade world cultures lesson celebrates the voyage of Columbus to America. Students begin by reading a section of their text that describes Columbus' navigation of the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria; his conquest of the New World; and the development of America that followed. Class activities include discussions about the implications of Columbus' voyage and participation in cooperative learning groups to explore how the exchange of plants, animals, and human life between Europe and American changed history throughout the world.

* See Appendix F for a copy of this lesson.

Infused lesson. My objective is to teach a world cultures lesson that critically examines the voyage of Columbus to America. As part of this experience I plan to heighten the learners' consciousness about difference and diversity through the study of a historic event which engages their critical thinking capabilities. Given the sensitive issues surrounding Columbus I need to consider a safe and comfortable approach that requires students to discuss and debate issues and to identify and describe other points of view, different factors, consequences, and objectives. I want my students to think critically about the notion of Columbus "discovering" America. I think I will organize this lesson around the theme of discovery and create some opportunities for students to consider their own views as well as those of their classmates, historians, and scholars. This lesson will definitely activate our use of the class ground rules we established for talking to and treating each other respectfully.

> **Activity 1.** I want to draw directly on learner experiences with this discovery theme and lay the foundation for introducing information about Columbus. I am beginning this lesson with an exercise called, "The Discovery of a Ball Field." Each participant receives a copy of the Ball Field Story and a Point of View (POV) chart. Students are divided into triads, asked to read the story, and complete the chart showing the three POVs represented in the story. In their triads, participants compare and contrast the three POVs; consider different factors, consequences, and objectives; and prepare a summary for the large-group discussion. My students can relate to the Ball Field Story. It describes a series of discovery and ownership issues that arise about a neighborhood playing field in East Town as the area changes from an Italian and Irish neighborhood to one that is also home to African Americans and Latino families. As the students discuss the POV of the European Americans, the African Americans, and the Latino Americans, many ideas and issues about discovery emerge. This activity serves as a foundation for the Columbus-focused exercise on discovery.

Activity 2. I pass out four handouts to the class: "Guidelines for Discovery Exercise", "Native American Point of View", "Columbus' Point of View", and "Discovery Points of View Chart". Students return to their original triad groups and complete the small-group activity. Each student selects one of three stories to read, completes their POV chart, and discusses their story in the triad. Together the students compare and contrast the three POVs; discuss the different factors, consequences, and objectives; and summarize their learnings. During whole-class discussions, students share the learnings that surfaced during their triad exchanges.

Reflections. Without fail, this lesson generates spirited discussion throughout the class. Many students who had rejected the Columbus story as it was traditionally presented viewed this experience as an opportunity to engage in discussions that allowed a broader view to emerge. Through this experience, students were able to analyze and debate historical information in exciting ways. Together we wrestled with the challenges of different POVs and the issue of subjectivity in historic documentation. Students said the lesson presented this way enabled them to release their frustrations and feel comfortable learning about Columbus. I felt pleased because students asked powerful questions that didn't have simplistic answers. They actively engaged in the process of knowledge construction and self-empowerment. With this lesson my facilitation skills were key as well as my ability to help expose the strengths and weaknesses of each POV.

■ **The Components of the Lesson-Infusion Process Applied to the Columbus Lesson**

1. **Review your subject matter to determine what you plan to teach. Then ask yourself, "What do I need to do to align my beliefs and practices with the "New Vision of the Urban Learner."**

My objectives for teaching this world cultures lesson on the voyage of Columbus to America are to heighten my students' consciousness about difference and diversity through the study of an historic event and the engagement of critical thinking capabilities.

The controversy surrounding this content and my awareness of many students' skepticism about Columbus requires me to develop a lesson format that will support scholastic challenges and opportunities for discussing multiple points of view. I must also establish an environment that is psychologically safe in order to maximize participation and enhance our opportunity to learn.

2. **Make a connection between the students' experience and the curriculum content.**

I am organizing this lesson around the theme of discovery as a way to have students consider their own views of Columbus' voyage to America as well as those of their classmates, various historians, and scholars.

3. **Begin your lesson with an activity that connects to the strengths students bring. Then, build on it with activities that draw on their experiences and furthers their learning.**

This lesson begins with an exercise that draws directly on students' experiences with discovery and ownership issues that arise about a neighborhood playing field. My students have a lot of experience dealing with issues of turf in the city. This introductory exercise lays the foundation for discussing the the Columbus-focused activity on discovery.

The second activity focuses on the question of what constitutes "discovery" in the historical event of Columbus' voyage to America. This activity engages students in inquiry and advocacy skills that result in thoughtful and spirited discussion. Through the small and large group discussions students are exposed to a broader view of the Columbus story provided by a variety of historians and scholars.

4. **Reflect on the instructional experience to note new insights and considerations for change.**

Many students who rejected the Columbus story as it was traditionally presented viewed this as an opportunity to engage in "serious" discussions that allowed a broader view to emerge. This was very important to me for I feel it is my responsibility as a teacher to expand my students' thinking and empower them to inquire, pose problems, and seek their own answers. Teaching this way challenged my facilitation skills and my objectivity as various issues unfolded.

Lesson infusion, as illustrated by the two examples described above, is only one of many ways in which the background experiences of urban students can be connected with curriculum content. It allows teachers to strengthen the lessons they are accustomed to teaching by transforming them after considering the background experiences of their students.

Conclusion

This guide explores the construct of Learner Experience (LE), a means of learning about the background experiences of urban students and connecting them with formal school learning. There is evidence when background experiences are used in this way, urban students are more engaged in learning.

The first section of the guide, **Using Learner Experience**, after describing the construct of LE, suggests ways to uncover the significant experiences of students and develop teachers' capacity in discovering LE. The second section, **Using Learner Experiences to Develop Meaningful Instruction**, gives two examples of the lesson infusion process, a strategy for transforming traditional lessons into modified lesson which use LE.

Much remains to be done beyond lesson infusion before LE is embedded throughout the school culture. The Urban Education Project (UE) at Research for Better Schools (RBS), through its on-going work with schools and districts, is studying how the construct can be more thoroughly understood and communicated to other educators. For example, UE is currently helping educators in using interview and observation techniques to access LE and learn about its value. Other UE activities include determining

what teachers know about LE, how teachers use this information in practice, and the ways in which LE overlaps the other themes of the Urban Learner Framework. The UE Project will continue to share its work in progress with others striving to improve the success of urban students.

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APPENDIX A

The Urban Learner Framework: An Overview

THE URBAN LEARNER FRAMEWORK: AN OVERVIEW

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A large gap between the academic performance of most majority culture students and poor urban children continues to exist in the 1990s despite numerous school reform efforts across the country. The failure to educate a significant number of children in marginalized populations living in poor, urban areas may be due to current and past practices (e.g., traditional, formal curricula; focus on dominant cultural values; emphasis on linguistic and mathematical intelligences) and policies (e.g., tracking, norm-referenced testing). In addition, some researchers are convinced that available restructuring designs and national reform proposals **do not** adequately address the unique issues and conditions facing urban schools (Fullan, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Lytle, 1992; Newmann, 1993; Olsen et al., 1994); therefore, they fail to substantially impact the achievement problems of large numbers of poor urban students. The outcome is that many students do not have an equal opportunity to learn. This limits their ability to become competitive in America's economy and to participate in democratic institutions.

The Urban Education staff at Research for Better Schools (RBS) have developed a conceptual framework which specifically addresses the complex issues that must be dealt with in urban restructuring efforts. This overview of our Urban Learner Framework (ULF) describes its two major features: (1) four research-based themes which serve as the foundation for a new vision of the urban learner, and (2) the ramifications of the research-based themes for decisionmaking within the functional areas of school organization.

Research-Based Themes

Recent theories of intelligence, learning, and instruction reject conceptions of urban learners as culturally-deprived, lacking in ability, unmotivated, and at-risk. Instead these theories suggest there are four research-based themes which, taken together, generate a vision of urban learners as culturally-diverse, capable, motivated, and resilient. The following sections provide an overview of the four

research-based themes which support this new vision of the urban learner, and which also comprise the knowledge upon which the ULF (see Figure 1) is based.

Cultural Diversity and Learning

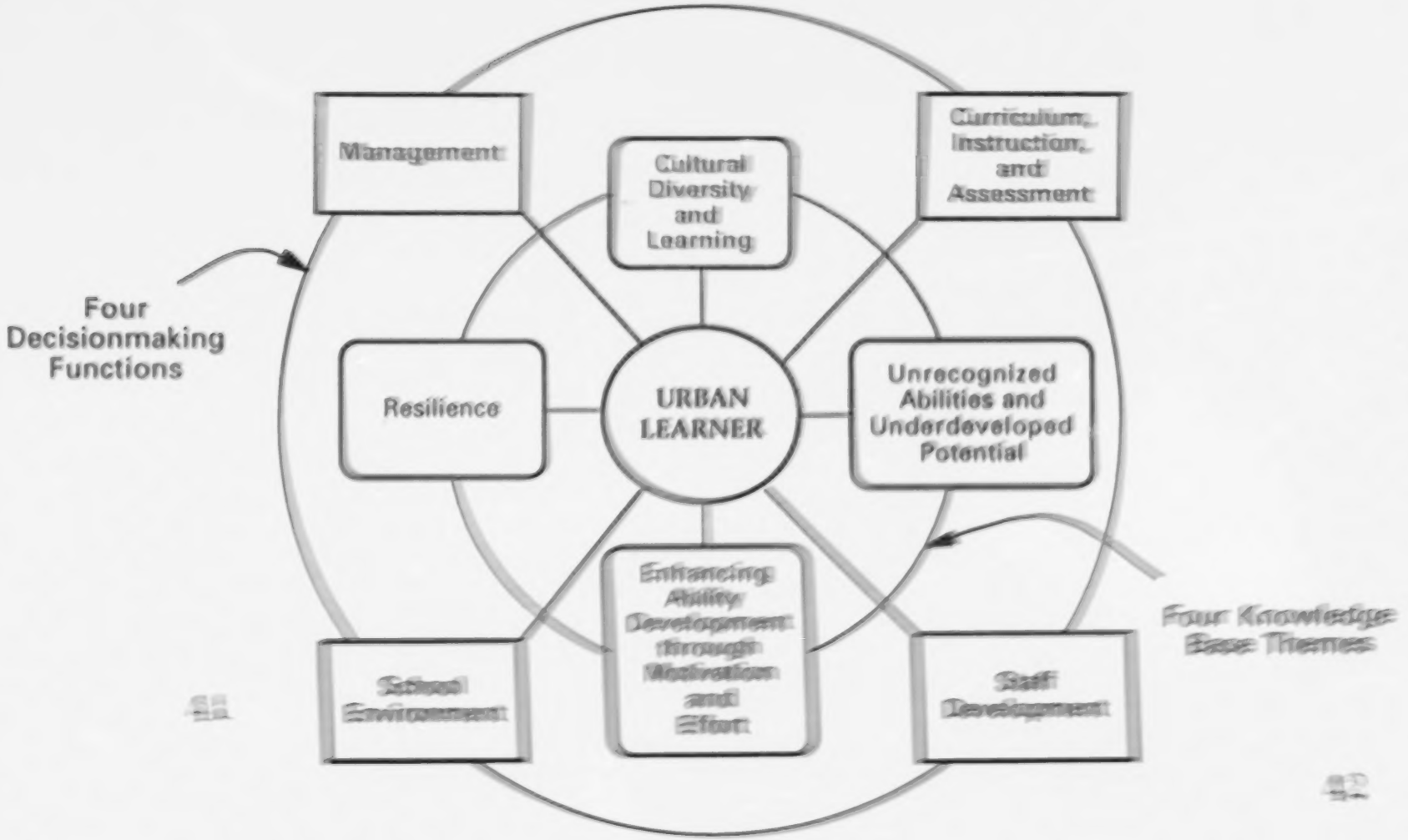
All children bring specific cultural knowledge, experiences, and strengths with them to school. However, currently there is a mismatch between the instruction and curriculum in many schools and the cultural experiences and strengths of urban students. The new vision of the urban learner that is contained within the ULF addresses this mismatch. The ULF suggests that teachers connect with learner's experiences and challenge them with relevant instructional materials in order to facilitate learning and intellectual and cognitive growth (Prawat, 1993; Knapp et al., 1993), and thereby fully develop each child (Vygotsky, 1978).

In other words, this first theme of the ULF asks educators to value and access urban learners' cultures, unique social experiences, and operant verbal and behavioral skills, and to weave these essential elements into instructional activities within the formal curriculum. Numerous research studies and school programs highlight the importance of teachers being sensitive to students' diverse cultural backgrounds and social experiences as a basis for learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Villegas, 1991). This sensitivity activates teachers to think strategically about strategically about urban learners' differing strengths and needs, especially in the teaching/learning process. Teachers' knowledge of students' differences help them to better understand the diverse ways in which urban learners interact with subject matter and become engaged with important concepts and approaches. Thus, this theme suggests that urban learners will achieve greater academic success if their cultural backgrounds and unique experiences are connected with the curriculum.

The theme also suggests that staff development should prepare teachers to work with students from diverse subcultures, and prepare school administrators to collaborate with parent groups and community agencies to ensure student learning and growth. In so doing, a school environment can be created in which each learner's cultural identity is valued and used as one basis for instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Tharp, 1989, 1993). In sum, each educator's understanding and appreciation of urban learners'

Figure 1

URBAN LEARNER FRAMEWORK



cultures, and integration of them into the formal curriculum, becomes the linchpin for successful instruction of urban learners.

The emphasis on culture in the UCF is grounded in anthropological, sociological, and psychological theory which highlights the fundamental role that culture plays in all human development. Culture refers to a group's values, knowledge, traditions, verbal styles, linguistic and interaction patterns, and distinct behavioral strategies. Culture is shared by members of a group (e.g., racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious) and learned by children through everyday social interaction and talk with peers and adults (Cosaro & Eder, 1994).

Unrecognized Abilities and Underdeveloped Potential

The second theme focuses on enhancing educators' capacity to recognize the specific abilities that enable all children to survive --- and even thrive --- in both the majority culture and the inner city. Each child possesses a different combination of natural talents including musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences (Gardner, 1983). These talents have a biological base, but they are also strongly shaped by specific cultural contexts. As Gardner notes, "language, a universal skill, may manifest itself particularly as writing in one culture, as oratory in another culture, and as the secret language of seagrants in a third" (1993, p. 16).

In American schools today, most curricula, classroom instruction, and student assessments reflect a bias of the dominant culture which emphasizes linguistic and mathematical skills as the major abilities to be developed. In addition to these abilities, this theme recognizes and advocates other cultural strengths and abilities that many urban learners exhibit, such as leadership, confidence, persistence, practicality, artistry, imagination, humor, visualization, a sense of community, and expressive verbal skills (Baytops, 1992). Bernal (1993) argues that addressing these characteristics might be an effective approach to teaching urban students. Thus, teachers, administrators, and school settings might emphasize such factors and blend them with "realistic, relevant curricula that introduces academic rigor" (p. 16).

Along these lines, a curriculum that includes cooperative or team learning provides the foundation for emotional enthusiasm -- even celebration -- of intellectual accomplishments. Still another hidden

talent of many urban learners is their sense of practicality, a commitment to acting on what is real. Bernal (1995, p. 15) notes urban learners are understandably concerned with the reality that they must survive every day. Accordingly, educators must address these practical matters if it ever hopes to engage these youngsters routinely in more abstract, less immediate exercises of cognitive ability. Alternatively, educators must demonstrate how what they wish to teach has real life application to urban youth.

Cognitive research suggests that intelligence is modifiable and not fixed (Feuerstein, 1980; 1985). Research indicates that traditional tests of intelligence are inadequate predictors of success in life and work after formal schooling (Jencks et al., 1972; Sternberg, 1985; Peters, 1988). Thus, the multiple intelligences of all learners can be developed throughout a lifetime. In addition, recent research and cognitive theory suggests that intelligence is malleable and multifaceted, and includes more than verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical capacities (Feuerstein, 1990; Gardner 1983, 1993). Specifically, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences: "pluralizes the traditional concept [of intelligence]. An intelligence entails the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting. The problem-solving skill allows one to approach a situation in which a goal is to be obtained and to locate the appropriate route to that goal. The creation of a cultural product is crucial in such functions as capturing and transmitting knowledge or expressing one's views or feelings" (Gardner, 1993, p. 15). In short, this theme maintains that educators who recognize, nurture, and reward children's strengths and varied intelligences will ultimately help them realize their full potential.

Enhancing Ability Development Through Motivation and Effort

Many educators harbor beliefs that emphasize the role of innate ability in achievement. In urban schools, this often means that students' errors are interpreted as an indication of inability rather than opportunities for further learning. Thus, urban learners' potential to learn all too often goes undeveloped. Consequently, their motivation and school effort also wane.

Research indicates that motivation plays a critical role in the learning process (Ames, 1992). Specifically, students' intrinsic motivation increases when they find their academic work to be personally relevant. In addition, learners are more likely to achieve when they express positive self-concepts, display high levels of self-efficacy and self-regulation, and have goals of understanding rather than performing (Alexander & Murphy, 1994).

This third theme suggests that teachers should create classroom environments in which students learn from their errors and effort is rewarded. Recent research on other cultures (e.g., Japan, South Korea) indicates that high academic achievement is supported by the belief that ability increases under positive, supportive conditions, such as teachers having high expectations for all students, believing in effort, and recognizing that students learn through different experiences (Lee, 1992; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Along this same line, teachers in this country could provide more opportunities for students to learn from their errors and to be rewarded for their efforts by promoting the use of group problem-solving activities and project-focused tasks (Maehr & Midgley, 1991).

In summary, this theme suggests, in concert with the two previous themes, that urban learners' natural motivation and effort can be activated and increased by educators who recognize and value learners' special strengths and abilities, connect these cultural elements to the curriculum in meaningful ways, provide abundant opportunities for students to learn from their errors, and provide rich rewards for meaningful effort.

Resilience

The fourth theme focuses on resilience, which refers to urban learners' energy and their strategies for overcoming adversity. Resilience is fostered when educators provide urban learners with caring, challenging, and meaningful classroom experiences that support children's intrinsic motivation in school and enhance their resistance to the dangers of the inner city such as gangs, violence, and the use of illegal drugs. Resilience operates as a coping strategy, or protective mechanism, which facilitates a healthy response to risk situations which occur at crucial times during one's life (Rutter, 1987). For example, as Winfield (1991) notes: "A student's decision to remain in school when he or she sees few

job opportunities, receives no support or incentives, and experiences negative peer pressure would be an example of an individual's resilience during a critical transition to adulthood. This decision would determine the trajectory of future educational success" (p. 7).

Recent research shows that many urban learners are competent, responsible, productive, and healthy individuals (Winfield, 1991). However, learners in urban areas, particularly, are in the precarious position of suffering daily from dangerous forces beyond their control. This theme suggests that schools that adopt the new view of the urban learner will create classroom conditions that increase the resiliency of more urban children. Research findings show that students develop resilience in school from caring and supportive teachers and from an accelerated curriculum built on high expectations (Benard, 1991). Under these conditions, protective mechanisms can be developed that reduce the impact of risk, alter the "deficit" mentality and negative labeling, raise students self-efficacy and self-esteem, and open new opportunities for learning. As Winfield (1993) notes, this alternative approach is an investment in their potential.

In the end, it should be noted that there is much overlap and many interconnections among these four research-based themes. Integration of knowledge and meaning across the themes leads to a new vision of urban learners. This new vision of the urban learner focuses on urban children's cultural backgrounds, their unique strengths and talents, and the importance of tapping into their intrinsic motivation and effort, which, taken together, fosters their resilience and likelihood of leading productive, successful lives.

Decisionmaking Within Functional Areas

The second major feature of the Urban Learner Framework is a set of decisionmaking guidelines to aid educators in their efforts to use the ULF knowledge base in moving toward systemic change. Every day, urban educators at all levels make decisions in each of four functional areas of school organization: (1) determining appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) designing effective staff development programs; (3) establishing a supportive school environment; and (4) building visionary leadership and effective management. These decisions should be reviewed through the lens and informed by the research-based knowledge and unique vision of the urban learner incorporated in the

Urban Learner Framework. Information from the four themes of the new vision can also help urban educators conduct needs assessments and prioritize strategies in each of these four important functional areas.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Curriculum and instruction make schooling more meaningful and engaging for urban students when tied to their real cultural experiences and personally-held values (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992). Such relevant curriculum and instruction identifies authentic tasks in the curriculum (Jones, 1993) and facilitates the development of students' abilities and the knowledge relevant to their lives and the needs of society (Cohen, 1992). The assessment of learning in such curriculum and instruction requires measures that are broader and deeper than most standardized paper-and-pencil tests. The assessment of performances, projects, and portfolios are examples of such measures. Used wisely by teachers, these alternative forms of assessment can elicit hidden talents (Lomax, West, Harmon, Viator, & Madaus, 1992) and more accurately reflect the broad range of curriculum and instruction experienced by the students (Jones, 1993).

Staff Development

Expanding awareness, understanding, and valuing, and engaging culturally different students in authentic learning calls for new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving for educators in a school system. Staff development programs ought to serve as catalysts for cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in teachers. Specifically, since research indicates that teachers' beliefs play a central role in their everyday practice (Pajares, 1992), progressive programs must facilitate greater awareness and valuing of culturally different students by teachers. In addition to the traditional core component of staff development (basic skills, content, and academics), programs consistent with the new vision need to include elements that stress the role of the classroom educator as a "guide" who understands how students learn at different stages of development and employs effective strategies to elicit and nurture their learning (Jackson, 1992, p. 37). From this perspective, staff development needs to imbue teachers

with the feeling that they are part of a "community of learners;" teachers need to become mediators and collaborators who constantly learn about their students' cultural backgrounds and support the development of every student's particular abilities (Ayers, 1993; Moll, et al., 1992).

School Environment

School environments that reflect the ULF knowledge base are ones that have high expectations, a challenging curriculum, and valued activities and roles for students. Adults exhibit caring, support, and concern for building positive student self-esteem. They are focused on developing individual potential and promoting growth, a sense of future, and success for every student. Similarly, the environment beyond the school itself, which includes families, the community, local school district administration, state and federal agencies, legislators, and other stakeholders, needs to be organized to promote every youngster's growth and learning.

Management

Leadership that supports shared, decentralized decisionmaking will help staff focus on the backgrounds, strengths, and experiences of urban learners. Management strategies that include collaboration with community agencies and enhancing the home environment will also help to bolster student growth and learning (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). In these multiple ways, educators in the inner city should strive to develop more fully their students' abilities and academic potential.

In conclusion, the Urban Learner Framework suggests a number of connections among the four knowledge themes that comprise the new vision of the urban learner and the type of decisions which will lead to needed changes within each of the four functional areas of school organization. One can see that the framework calls for systemic change in urban education. Focusing attention on either the process of organizational change (e.g., decentralization, shared decisionmaking, collaboration) or the pedagogy of instruction (e.g., higher order thinking skills instruction, technology, curriculum integration) is not sufficient to produce changed student outcomes. What is required is the systemic application of

integrated knowledge bases, such as those in the ULF, to decisions across major functional areas of the school. It indicates that, in the end, educational reform must be fully systemic and requires the collective, focused, and creative energy of educators, researchers, legislators, and leaders (Conley, 1993; Fullan, 1992).

Along these lines, Belinda Williams, Director of the Urban Education Project at RBS, notes: "There must be a way of reaching consensus around the new vision of the urban learner so that the curriculum reflects it, staff development addresses it at the district and the school levels, leadership manages it, state education agencies establish and monitor regulations consistent with it, and federal funds support the effort. You can't have a school or district doing one thing, the state holding it accountable for something else, and the federal government funding something completely different" (Williams, quoted in Spray, 1992, p. 2).

Williams and the RBS Urban Education staff are working to implement the framework at several of these levels. They are currently working with schools in Camden, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. to develop and test strategies that move teachers and administrators through various levels of understanding (awareness, commitment, ownership) of the new vision. Through these efforts, the Urban Education staff are continuing to gain a broader understanding of how to put sound theory and research into tools to inform practice in the interests of the urban learner. This information is being disseminated to educators and the academic research community through presentations at professional conferences, articles in newsletters and journals, and new products being developed by the staff.

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APPENDIX B

The LE Connection in Complex Classrooms

The LE Connection in Complex Classrooms

Imagine how different the classroom experience of poor urban children would be from current practice if the curriculum was built around their learner experience.

Step into such a classroom for a moment to see how the teacher fashions curriculum and instruction to build on the generalized characteristics of the student's home cultures.

> Ms. Tonouchi* teaches a fifth-grade class of 26 students, over half of whom are of Asian descent. Ms. Tonouchi is Japanese-American and speaks "passable" Spanish, Japanese, and French. She works hard to create opportunities for students to bring their cultures into the classroom and to communicate to students a respect for their cultures.
>
> For example, Ms. Tonouchi sought and received extra funds from a local foundation to purchase a series of trade books that would serve as the basic reading material in the class. The books focused heavily on the lives of inner-city minority adolescents and their struggles growing up in big cities. She explicitly chose books that addressed issues relevant to Asian students, who she thinks are often overlooked in discussions about minority youngsters. Moreover, in every subject area, Ms. Tonouchi worked hard to provide opportunities for students to direct their own learning. In mathematics, students choose the topics they will analyze for graph-making exercises, for example. In language arts, students are asked to write short books, following the structure of a book or story the class has read, based on important characters in their own lives.
>
> Beyond these activities, Ms. Tonouchi also adapts instruction in response to students' strengths and weaknesses. For example, she recognizes that her Asian students possess the strength of being able to work on their own with little structure from the teacher. She builds on this (and uses the students as role models for others) by providing many opportunities for students to direct their own learning in small groups. At the same time, she argues that may Asians are at a disadvantage in this school because of their shyness and reticence to speak out in class -- a trait respected in certain Asian cultures but often disabling in this school of many strong personalities. Consequently, Ms. Tonouchi structures numerous learning opportunities in which students are required to speak out forcefully. She asks the students to participate in dramatic activities (they recently staged a class performance of "The Three Pigs Operetta"), and often uses bean-bag tossing and other techniques to get students out of their chairs and "acting out" (in a positive way) during class.

The result for the students in such a classroom are increased engagement and opportunity to learn.

There is a multidimensional, complex classroom world that provides the opportunity to increase student engagement and learning by using student backgrounds to increase learning opportunities.

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* This classroom and the continuum in Figure 1 are from: Knapp, et. al., (1993). ***Academic challenge for the children of poverty. Volume I: Findings and conclusions.*** Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning.

Figure 1 describes teacher classroom responses along the continuum. The continuum reflects the hypothesis that suggests, "the more teachers take students' backgrounds into account to increase learning opportunities, the better for student engagement and learning." The most constructive responses fall at the far right of the continuum indicating those teachers who most actively and constructively take students' backgrounds into account. Those who actively use background information to limit the opportunity to learn are considered the most nonconstructive. Passive responses fall in the middle.

This typology is somewhat artificial and it is difficult to classify individual teachers because their responses to backgrounds vary across situations, time, and subject matter. Most teachers studied are relatively passive in dealing with student differences. Some are unaware of such differences, others argue differences are unimportant.

Additional descriptions of classrooms in which teachers responses to differences vary along the continuum can be found in the full report.

Figure 1

A Continuum of Teachers' Responses to Differences in Students' Backgrounds*

Nonconstructive		Constructive		
Active	**Passive**	**Passive**	**Active**	**Proactive**
A few teachers hold negative stereotypes about students from specific backgrounds. They believe that all but the exceptional child from a certain cultural or economic group possess significant limitations that cannot be overcome. Teachers holding these beliefs are likely to take active steps in the classroom to restrict the academic opportunities of such students. Some rationalize their behavior by saying that they do not want to embarrass or frustrate these students with work that is too difficult or advanced.	Some teachers hold no prejudice against students because of their backgrounds. At the same time they know little or nothing about children's lives outside of school that might affect their participation in instruction. This ignorance leads to missed opportunities, lessons that are often irrelevant to children's lives, and sometimes misunderstanding of student behavior, resulting in mis-judgments of students' needs. Perhaps in an attempt to avoid controversy or overt discrimination, teachers who respond to student differences in this way often teach a "homogenized" curriculum in which all students are viewed and treated as middle class and "all-American."	On the surface, constructive, passive teacher responses are similar to those in the nonconstructive, passive category. They demonstrate no negative attitudes or dispositions toward student differences, nor do they adapt teaching and content to accommodate or reflect differences. Unlike those in the nonconstructive, passive group, however, teachers in this group possess a basic awareness of students' backgrounds (some are very familiar with students' cultures). In addition, they possess uniformly high expectations for students, regardless of their backgrounds. More importantly, these teachers design and implement instruction so that students can bring their personal experiences into the classroom. For example, students may be asked to write about something important to them. Yet, in creating such experiences, the teacher does not design assignments to be based on specific aspects of the students' backgrounds (e.g., reading stories about leaving home or traveling to a strange country in a class with many immigrant students). Thus, the learning experience approaches the students' experience in a somewhat passive manner.	Teachers who approach student differences in a constructive, active way hold uniformly high expectations for student learning and believe that it is possible to overcome whatever dis-advantages certain students bring to school (e.g., a lack of print awareness). Unlike the previous group, these teachers believe that good teaching must build explicitly on students' cultural backgrounds. It is important to communicate to students explicitly that their cultural back-ground is not a "problem" to be overcome but a strength to be acknowledged and taken advantage of.	This category includes actions that represent an especially proactive approach to student differences. They also share a commitment to seeing students achieve with their cultures intact and celebrated, and are aware of the strengths students bring with them to school as well as the extra-school factors that can hinder students' academic performance. They are confident that, within their classrooms, students can achieve. These teachers believe that they can create conditions within their classrooms that will enable all students to learn. Beyond affirming each culture, however, these teachers design instruction to build explicitly on students' strengths and to address and ameliorate academic or social problems partly rooted in students' home lives. In addition to choosing a specific curricular material or exercise (e.g., a trade book about Africa or an essay on slavery) to maintain students' interest and communicate a respect for culture, proactive teachers alter the method of teaching in response to students' cultural characteristics. These teachers not only use content and strategy to send signals of respect and to pique interest, but also seek to take advantage of culturally generated ways of learning to teach students to acquire new skills.

* Adapted from: Knapp, M.S., Adelman, N.E., Marder, C., McCollum, H., Needels, M.C., Shields, P.M., Turnbull, B.J., & Zuker, A.A. (1993). ***Academic challenge for the children of poverty. Volume I: Findings and conclusions.*** Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Office of Policy and Planning. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 358213)

APPENDIX C

Urban Children's Interests, Hopes,. and Concerns:
Preliminary Patterns

URBAN CHILDREN'S INTERESTS, HOPES, AND CONCERNS: PRELIMINARY PATTERNS

The information reported below represents recurrent patterns from a preliminary analysis of over 70 in-depth interviews and frequent observations of African-American, Latino, Vietnamese, and Cambodian children attending a large elementary school in an urban area. The majority of observations and interviews were conducted with sixth, fourth, and second grade girls and boys from poor and working class families. We also spent time with students in first grade and kindergarten. The interviews generally lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and allowed the children to talk openly about their favorite in- and out-of-school activities, their future aspirations, and any concerns they have about school, their neighborhood, and city. Overall, for this project, we collected information from approximately 120 children.

The information is reported below according to the dimensions of Learner Experience and further categorized according to common themes which emerged within each dimension. The findings represent common experiences of boys and girls across several different racial groups. Future data collection and analysis will identify and report differences between boys and girls and children from different racial and ethnic groups.

You will note that many of the urban elementary student experiences, interests, and behaviors presented below look much like those of the majority of children growing up in America. However, an examination of the expanded examples below also display differences e.g., urban children's frequent and intense, direct experiences with the social problems of the inner city, problem-solving in the urban environment, or knowledge of specific cultural backgrounds.

LE Dimension	Common Themes Within Urban Elementary Student Experiences
Knowledge, Skills	**Family Experiences:** Travel to see relatives, shopping, cooking, cleaning, complaints that parents work all the time and/or are rarely home, playing video games, watch TV together
	School Experiences: Wide range -- from very positive (e.g., feel teacher cares about them, has high expectations for them, challenges them, provides feedback, makes class fun and interesting, enjoy extracurricular activities (e.g., choir, drill team)) to negative (e.g., teacher doesn't listen to me, is not fair, and is too tough on students)
	Social Competence: Children learn to adapt to dangerous situations with positive coping strategies; many do not feel safe in neighborhoods due to gang violence, drive-by shootings, drug dealing and prostitution; they also express concern with noise and pollution; some neighorhoods are better than others; there are some parks and malls where they go to be with friends and family; many have witnessed acts of violence, some feel they have been hassled by police.
	Popular Culture: Listening to music (pop, rap, jazz); viewing movies (scary, funny, romantic, adventure, action); watching TV programs (sitcoms); playing video games; reading (popular magazines, sports magazines, adventure stories)

LE Dimension	Common Themes Within Urban Elementary Student Experiences
Values, Beliefs, Interests, Motivations	**Values/Beliefs/World View:** Compassion for others, desire to make world a better place, having nice clothes, being attractive, tough, competitive, aggressive, concern with parents not being able to find jobs
	Interests/Preferences: Playing with friends, double dutch, going to the mall shopping, talking with friends; **sports**–swimming, basketball, kickball, football, basketball, soccer; **playing video games**–Sega Genesis, Super Nintendo (e.g., *Streetfighter, Mortal Kombat, Sonic the Hedgehog*)
	Universal Themes: Fear, being scared, having fun, adventure, discovery, curious about animals, interest in technology, computers, comedy, being yourself
	Social Issues: Concern with drugs, violence, prostitution in their city, parents finding good jobs, pollution, environment, homeless people, dilapidated housing
	Hopes/Dreams/Aspirations: Lawyer, doctor, hairstylist, ice skater, nurse, teacher, singer, veterinarian, professional athlete, scientist, chiropractor, architect, artist, governor, president
Behaviors	**Language Use:** Gossip, self-disclosure, creative and forceful expression, ritual insulting
	Multiple Intelligences/Cognitive Patterns: Musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic as well as logical, mathematical and spatial
	Emotional Response/Feelings: From intense happiness to intense sadness; from hopefulness to depression; anger and frustration; beginning to see signs of disconnection from school
	Peer Relationships/Peer Culture: Small cliques forming, some best-friendships, some jealousy, competition to be popular, well-liked, concern with appearance, romance, dating boys, friendships with peers who attend other schools, some large groups who hang out together, concern with athletics, toughness, competition
	Conflict: Disagreements and arguments with teachers, parents, and peers

EXPANDED EXAMPLES OF URBAN CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE

Compassion for Others, Social Concerns, Commitment to Change
(Excerpts from Letters to President Clinton)

- I would tell [President Clinton] to let everybody that's not working to give them a job, because that's how all this violence is starting. (*12 year old, African American girl*)
- I would tell [President Clinton] to stop the violence [and] give the homeless a shelter or a home, and try to find a job for them. (*12 year old, Latino boy*)
- I would tell [President Clinton] to get rid of drugs and help the homeless. (*12 year old, Latino girl*)
- I like to help people a lot. I have a dream [that] I'll grow up and be a doctor and in the next dream, I'll be a lawyer. [We need help to] stop pollution, give more money to the poor, and take away violence. (*11 year old, African American girl*).
- I want everyone to hear my opinions on life, earth, and the environment. If I try really hard, I'll succeed and I will make a remarkable change in the world! (*12 year old, Latino girl*)

Cultural Background

Several of the Latino girls are learning traditional Puerto Rican dances under the direction of an aunt of one of the girls. They wear traditional dresses and perform at birthday parties, holidays, and school assemblies. The girls enjoy this activity and are proud of their performances.

Contextualized Problem-Solving
[Finding a fun and safe place to play in the city]

Two boys who spend a lot of time outside of school together are adept at finding safe places for what they termed "adventure" not far from the inner city. For example, they found a spot next to a bridge over a large river where they see ducks, snakes, turtles, and fish. They also like watching the many boats that pass by. They enjoy exploring the river bank and swimming in the river, which they say is, "...not as dirty as people think it is." Overall, these boys enjoy exploring nature and watching wildlife.

APPENDIX D

Ways to Access Learner Experience Information

Ways to Access Learner Experience Information

1. Connect with Students, Their Families and the Community

- Visit students' homes and community
- Confer with various community members
- Speak with parents (in-person; on the phone)
- Observe students in and out of school to discern patterns of behavior that may be related to their cultural backgrounds
- Assemble focus groups of students, parents, and community members
- Conduct surveys
- Shadow children
- Invite parents into the classroom to: share life experiences, demonstrate work skills and knowledge, explain community resources, describe cultural history, etc.
- Arrange for an outside agency to interview and/or audiotape or videotape students, families, community members and to share the information with all
- Exchange information with colleagues
- Listen to conversations between urban learners
- Observe the extracurricular activities students participate in-and also how they participate (e.g., the role they take)
- Use parent-teacher conferences as opportunities to gather LE data

2. Develop Learning Activities that Elicit Student LE Data

- Interview students or have students interview each other (e.g., Tell me about the job you have after school. What do you like/dislike about school? What happened during your trip?)
- Have students develop oral histories
- Have students produce neighborhood/home videos
- Use story extenders -- prompt questions to connect the contents of a story with the lives of the students (e.g., How is what Maria's mother said in the story the same or different from what your mother would have said?)
- Have students keep a journal/portfolio (e.g., learners write about their own experiences; respond to questions designed to surface LE data; collect artifacts; etc.)
- Have students create a mural reflecting community life
- Use art as a medium for accessing information about LE (e.g., create a drawing of your family; your neighborhood; a recent encounter)
- Provide time for show and tell
- Make observations of students during trips
- Have students develop a genealogy (e.g., profile or family tree)
- Provide opportunities for role playing (e.g., Act out how you think your neighbor would act in this same situation. Act out what you mean by success.) This strategy also provides an opportunity to observe body language and other non-verbal communication patterns.
- Incorporate learners' experience in test questions
- Provide students with a daily opportunity to practice greetings, conversation, sharing, and problem solving related to their non-school experiences (e.g., "morning meeting" process)
- Listen to student group discussions
- Encourage students to select topics for group discussion
- Provide an opportunity for students to photograph community subjects for classroom discussion

- Observe students during games
- Have students write about LE topics (e.g., favorite role model)

3. Use School-Based Resources

- Ask for information from teachers of different cultural backgrounds
- Speak with the community liaison
- Team up with a teacher who seems to connect very well with students from all types of backgrounds

4. Use Secondary Resources

- Find and read research (educational, sociological, psychological, etc.) about various racial and ethnic groups
- Read literature by writers from various cultures

5. Other

- Use students as resources for joint design and delivery of learning experiences

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Sources: Moll, et al. (1992), Villegas (1991), participants in Urban Learner Framework workshop, and members of the Urban Education Project/RBS.

APPENDIX E

Systematic Observation of In-School Learner Experience

Systematic Observation of In-School Learner Experience

A useful procedure for gathering information about students is systematic observation. It can be incorporated easily into the ongoing activities of the classroom. The data gathered from observation can be used to plan the curriculum, to devise ways to strengthen particular areas of development, and to plan activities enhancing current developmental strengths. Continuous observation will document progress.

*Guidelines for Observing**

1. **Set goals for observations** (which students? For what purpose?).

2. **Determine whether observations will be unfocused** (noting something interesting about a student) **or focused** (documenting specific behaviors e.g., language development).

3. **Record only what is seen or heard**. Observation should be based on fact, not opinion. The purpose of observation is to gather information providing evidence of the actual level of performance of the child.

4. **Do not interpret as you observe**. Interpretations should be based on repeated observations and a composite of information. Interpret the facts after the information has been recorded. Use words that describe, but do not judge or interpret to record observation.

5. **Record detailed facts in order of occurrence**. It is useful to include the context in which the behavior occurred. Make an effort to save writing time by leaving our unnecessary words.

6. **Write down what is seen or heard as soon as possible**. Do not trust your memory. It is more likely that observations will be accurate and objective if recorded immediately.

7. **Record the date and time of each note,** regardless of its brevity or content. Effective recording systems include:
   a. Index cards. Make a note on a card and move it to the bottom of the stack.
   b. Clip board.
   c. Self-stick notes.
   d. Notebook. Notes can be made on several pages for different students or categories.
   e. Tape recorder.

8. **Observe and record information often**. Daily if possible.

9. **Interpret observations carefully**. Have adequate data samples before you make interpretations. Check your observations and interpretations with a colleague.

Many aspects of student behavior may be observed in the school setting. It is important to consider the full range of behaviors that might offer information about student learning. For example, behaviors occur in the following developmental categories: cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical. They may include both verbal and non-verbal communication and physical and can occur across multiple intelligences.

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* Adapted from: Michigan State Board of Education. (1992). ***Appropriate assessment of young children.*** Lansing, MI: Michigan State Board of Education, Early Childhood Education and Planning Office. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 360412)

APPENDIX F

Columbus' Voyage to America Lesson

Guidelines for the *Discovery* of a *BALL FIELD* Exercise

- Distribute "The Discovery of a Ball Field" and "Points of View" (POV) handouts
- Divide the group of students into triads
- Students read the story and complete the chart showing all three POVs
- Students compare and contrast the three POVs and prepare a summary for the large group discussion.

THE *"DISCOVERY"* OF A BALL FIELD

"East Town" began as a neighborhood of Italian and Irish immigrants. Most of them worked in nearby textile mills. A strong rivalry existed between the two ethnic groups, which was most prominent in the weekly ball games at the neighborhood field -- baseball in the spring and summer, football in the fall and winter. Over the years, the two ethnic groups lost much of their ethnic purity and blended into the mainstream American culture, but their weekend afternoon ball games maintained their rivalry on a friendly basis. They assumed that this was the way things would always be.

During the 1970s, African Americans began to move into East Town. They were greeted with curiosity and icy hostility. Residents tried to ignore them and continue old traditions. Some African American residents were spectators at the ball games. After some time, whenever one of the teams was short of players, the new residents were invited to play. They found the newcomers to be good athletes, but they were never welcomed to become permanent members of either team. Instead, the African Americans established their own touch football team, and after several confrontations and heated arguments about who owned the field, began using the field on Sunday afternoons for their games. No further problem developed and a peaceful coexistence became the norm. Each group had what they wanted.

Then one spring a strange thing happened. One Saturday morning when the baseball team members came to practice before the game, they saw another group using the field to play soccer.

Several Latino families had recently moved into the far corners of the neighborhood, learned of other Latinos living in nearby areas, and gathered enough players to begin their favorite game -- soccer! They began searching for a place to play and after exploring the new neighborhood, they "discovered" a field that would be perfect. They made plans for their first game. Early Saturday morning they set up their goals and began to play. Halfway through the game, a noisy group disrupted the play. The baseball team told the soccer players that the field was originally theirs and the players would have to leave. The soccer players refused to leave, stating that the field was a public place and they were the first that day. But the other group pointed out they had been using the field for years to play baseball and the soccer team was intruding. The Latino group, on the other hand, said soccer was a much more interesting game than baseball and less animalistic than football. They refused to leave the field and told the baseball players to find another place to play their boring game.

BALL FIELD POINTS OF VIEW

Using the chart below, identify the points of view about the use of the field that the three major groups had in the story.

European Americans	African Americans	Latino Americans

Guidelines for the *DISCOVERY Exercise*

- Distribute Points of View (POV) stories: *Columbus, Native American, Descendants of Earlier Explorers*
- Divide students into triads
- Each member of the triad selects a different story to read
- Students study the story they selected and complete the POV chart
- Each student relays his/her story and shares the POV with other members of the triad
- As a triad, students compare and contrast the three POVs and summarize learnings
- Students discuss learnings in the large group.

NATIVE AMERICAN POINT OF VIEW

I am the voice of the descendants of various Native American people who inhibited the Western Hemisphere before Columbus made his voyage. Before 1492, our people fought among ourselves, but all lived in harmony with nature. We honored and respected the Earth by taking only what we needed and by giving thanks and gifts to the spirits during festivals and prayers.

When Columbus arrived, we were curious about him and his people. These strangers looked different, wore strange clothing, and had customs and ways that seemed foreign to us.

At first, we shared the streams, our crops, and the other resources of the Earth with Columbus. In return, we discovered that our spirit of openness was viewed as a sign of weakness. Our world of harmony and tranquillity disappeared and what emerged was a disaster from which our people have never recovered.

Our world became contaminated with European diseases and, as a result, thousands of Native Americans died. We were exposed to smallpox, typhoid fever, mumps, measles, and whooping cough. So many of us kept dying that we were unable to fight off the Europeans who came after Columbus.

Our people do not remember Columbus with fondness and joy. We do not view him as a great discoverer, but as an invader whose actions contributed to the conquering and decline of many nations of Native Americans.

EARLIER EXPLORERS' POINT OF VIEW

I am the voice which represents the descendants of all the explorers who traveled to the Western Hemisphere hundreds of years before Christopher Columbus. Many historians have uncovered evidence to support the conclusion that we reached the lands of America long before Columbus did.

Included among the long list of early explorers who need to be considered are the Black Africans who came to America as early as 1500 B.C., the Phoenicians in 600 B.C., the Jews of Palestine, before the birth of Jesus, the Romans in A.D. 64, Hoer-Shin from China in 499, St. Brendan of Ireland in the 6th century, the Vikings and the Welsh during the 11th century, and the Venician and Polish sailors in the 1400s.

While there are many unanswered questions about our visits to the Western Hemisphere before Columbus, it is clear that he was not first and our explorations of America were generally unrecognized and considered insignificant for many years. Some historians have said that this was because our voyages didn't make any real difference; they didn't create any major historical changes. We agree that we did not alter the environment or the conditions of the Native Americans in major ways. We also acknowledge that our journeys did not result in any major colonization or change in cultures, religions, values, politics, and lifestyles. We can also say that our explorations did not cause any destruction or tragic outcomes. We are proud of our people who made these early voyages and of their navigational skill. Columbus should not receive credit which is not due him.

DISCOVERY POINTS OF VIEW

Using the chart below, write down the points of view represented in the story.

Explorers	Columbus	Native Americans

COLUMBUS' POINT OF VIEW

I am the voice of the descendants of Christopher Columbus, a courageous explorer who set sail in 1492 to discover a new route to the Indies. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella provided him with three ships, the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria and as the brave admiral, he led some 90 men to the "New World."

Columbus made several voyages to the New World, in 1492, 1498, and 1502. He was a skilled navigator whose contributions to world history should be remembered with pride and glory. After all, he was the one who discovered the New World and gave the name "Indians" to the natives who met him at the shore.

He came from a greater civilization than that of the native Indians. These heathen people were lost souls until we settled in and implemented our language, customs, lifestyles, and religion.

Future Europeans benefited from his voyages in many ways. Explorers brought back crops, animals, spices, and Indians became a source of cheap labor. The domination and power over these natives in the New World enabled the cultivation of the soil and the growth of a wealth of prized crops like sugar, cotton, and tobacco. After the Indians died from the rapid spread of disease and more land became available, Africans were enslaved and transported to till in the rich fields.

As you can see, his discovery of the New World was a great accomplishment. It provided the beginning of European settlement and development in an area of the world that was previously underdeveloped.

ABOUT RESEARCH FOR BETTER SCHOOLS AND THE URBAN EDUCATION PROJECT

Research for Better Schools (RBS), a private, non-profit, educational research and development firm has been funded by the U.S. Department of Education since 1966 to serve as the educational laboratory for the Mid-Atlantic region. Using the expertise of some 60 staff members, RBS conducts research and policy studies of key educational issues, develops improvement approaches, and participates in national networking activities with other regional laboratories to enhance the use of research and development products and knowledge.

The present mission of the RBS Urban Education Project builds upon past experience. The Project seeks to initiate and support efforts to improve and restructure schooling in urban districts. Emphasis is placed on helping urban educators meet the diverse needs of students by developing an integrated knowledge base which incorporates and disseminates the most current, promising, and pertinent research. ***Guidelines for Integrating Learner Experiences into Instructional Strategies*** explores ideas that support using student background experiences as an integral part of formal learning.

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